

STATEMENT
of the
Honorable Heath Shuler, Chair
Subcommittee on Rural and Urban Entrepreneurship
House Committee on Small Business
Hearing on Maximizing the Value of Broadband Services to Rural Communities
May 9, 2007

Rural America is home to many different kinds of small businesses. In Western North Carolina, there are thriving high tech businesses, small manufacturers and family farms. What all of these businesses have in common is a need to stay connected with their customers, their suppliers, and with the information they need to run their businesses.

Today's hearing will focus on the challenges of providing reliable, affordable broadband access to these rural small businesses. Experience has shown that broadband can bring economic revitalization to small towns by creating clusters of small businesses.

Broadband services can also help farms and farm-related businesses control costs and optimize production. This technology can provide real-time access to weather reports, fertilization guidance, and livestock tracking. Farming communities must maximize their use of high-speed Internet access to encourage further development.

I am concerned that many of our country's rural and agriculture-based communities are not yet fully realizing the potential value of broadband services to their economies. As more of these communities gain high-speed access to the Internet, the next challenge is to help them use this access effectively to help create jobs and sustain growth.

There are many debates going on right now about broadband policy. We must ensure that the needs of rural small businesses are taken into account whenever local, state or federal governments act to change the broadband marketplace. During today's hearing, I hope we will begin a dialogue that will help make sure this happens.